Listing of Claims:

1. (currently amended)   A method for conducting an auction, comprising the steps of:

offering at least one item for sale over a computer network, for a first predetermined period of time;

receiving a first bid for said item from a first bidder over said computer network;

according a first value to said first bidder as a first function of at least one of a timing of said first bid and a worth of said first bid;

receiving at least one succeeding bid for said item from at least one other bidder over said computer network;

according a second value to said at least one other bidder as a second function of at least one of a timing of said succeeding bid and a worth of said second bid;

accumulating values accorded said first bidder for each bid placed by said first bidder during said auction;

accumulating values accorded each said at least one other bidder for each bid placed by said at least one other bidder during said auction;

comparing said accumulated values of said first bidder with said accumulated values of each said at least one other bidder;

identifying an auction leader based on a third function of said comparison of said accumulated values of said first bidder with said accumulated values of each of said at least one other bidder;

closing said auction <u>to all further bids by any bidder other than said auction leader</u> after said first predetermined period of time;

permitting said auction leader to make ~~a further~~ <u>one final</u> bid after said auction is closed, thereby encouraging bidders to ~~bid~~ <u>attempt to become the auction leader by bidding early and maintaining the high bid throughout the auction</u>.

2. (original) The method of claim 1, wherein said first function and said second function are substantially identical.

3. (original) The method of claim 1, wherein said first function and said second function are different.

4. (previously presented) The method of claim 3, wherein said first function accords a greater value to the earliest bid of a group of substantially identical bids, thereby encouraging bidders to bid to secure greater value for their bids in comparison with other bidders.

5. (original) The method of claim 1, wherein said first value decreases over time, until said first bid is made, during said first predetermined period of time, thereby encouraging early bidding on said item.

6. (original)   The method of claim 1, wherein said second value decreases over time, until said second bid is made, during said first predetermined period of time, thereby encouraging early bidding on said item.

7. (original)   The method of claim 6, wherein said first value decreases over time, until said first bid is made, during said first predetermined period of time, thereby encouraging early bidding on said item.

8. (original)   The method of claim 1, wherein said first function increases said accumulation of said first value during the time said first bid is worth more than all other bids.

9. (original)   The method of claim 1, wherein said second function increases said accumulation of said second value during the time said succeeding bid is worth more than all other bids.

10. (original)   The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

comparing said worth of said first bid and said worth of said at least one successive bid;

accumulating said value accorded said first bid when said worth of said first bid is greater than said worth of said at least one successive bid;

accumulating said value accorded said at least one successive bid when said worth of said at least one successive bid is greater than said worth of said first bid.

11. (original) The method of claim 10, wherein said comparing of said worth of said first bid with said worth of said at least one successive bid is performed on a substantially continuous basis.

12. (original) The method of claim 10, wherein said comparing of said worth of said first bid with said worth of said at least one successive bid is performed at predetermined times.

13. (original) The method of claim 12, wherein said predetermined times are incremental time periods.

14. (original) The method of claim 13, wherein said incremental time periods are days.

15. (original) The method of claim 13, wherein said incremental time periods are hours.

16. (original) The method of claim 13, wherein said incremental time periods are minutes.

17. (original) The method of claim 13, wherein said incremental time periods are seconds.

18. (original) The method of claim 10, wherein said accumulating of said values accorded to any bidder occurs each time said worth of a bid placed by said bidder exceeds a worth of all preceding bids.

19. (previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein a worth of a successive bid is required to be greater than a worth of a preceding bid by no less than a minimum increment, and wherein at least one of said first function of said timing of said first bid and said second function of said timing of said second bid accords a value which increases if said worth of said successive bid is greater than said worth of said preceding bid by more than said minimum increment, thereby encouraging successive bidders to place a bid having a worth in excess of said predetermined minimum increment plus said worth of said preceding bid.

22 20. (original) The method of claim 1, further comprising:

establishing a floor value of a bid on said item, and said according values to at least one of said first bid and said at least one successive bid depends upon the amount by which said at least one of said first bid and said at least one successive bid exceeds said floor value.

23 21. (original) The method of claim 1, wherein at least one of said first function and said second function accords a value based upon at least one predetermined timing consideration.

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24 22. (original) The method of claim 21, wherein said at least one predetermined timing consideration is the time of day.

25 23. (original) The method of claim 21, wherein said at least one predetermined timing consideration is proximity to the end of said first predetermined period of time.

26 24. (original) The method of claim 21, wherein said at least one predetermined timing consideration is the duration of the period any individual bid has remained the bid having the greatest worth.

27 25. (original) The method of claim 21, wherein said at least one predetermined timing consideration is having the bid with the greatest worth at predetermined time milestones.

28 26. (original) The method of claim 1, wherein at least one of said first function and said second function accords a value based upon at least one predetermined worth criterion.

29 27. (original) The method of claim 26, wherein said at least one predetermined worth criterion is being the bidder who places the first bid.

30 28. (original) The method of claim 26, further comprising:

establishing a floor value of acceptable bids for said item; and

wherein said at least one predetermined worth criterion is being the initial bidder who places a bid in excess of said floor.

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31   29. (original)   The method of claim 26, wherein said at least one predetermined

worth criterion is being the initial bidder to meet at least one predetermined bid worth threshold.

30. -33. (canceled)

32   34. (previously amended)   The method of claim 1, further comprising:

continuing said auction after said first predetermined period of time for a second

predetermined period of time;

limiting participation in said auction during said second predetermined period of

time to bidders based upon a fifth function of the total accumulated values of bids for each said

bidders accorded during said first predetermined period of time; and

closing said auction after said second predetermined period of time.

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33   35. (previously amended)   The method of claim 34, wherein bids placed during

said second predetermined period of time are weighted as a sixth function of accumulated values

of bids placed during said first predetermined period of time.

36. - 40. (canceled)

34   41. (previously amended)   The method of claim 1, wherein said auction leader

is accorded a benefit apart from said auction.

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35 42. (original) The method of claim 34, wherein said benefit is monetary in nature.

36 43. (original) The method of claim 35, wherein said benefit includes a credit against future auction purchases.

37 44. (original) The method of claim 35, wherein said benefit includes participation in an awards program.

38 45. (original) The method of claim 1,

wherein at least two substantially identical items are offered for sale;

wherein bidders are permitted to bid on more than one of said at least two substantially identical items;

wherein each bidder must specify how many of said at least two substantially identical items are being bid upon, and the amount of said bid; and

wherein values are accumulated for each bid on each item.

39 46. (original) The method of claim 38, wherein said values of each bid on each item are accumulated separately by bidder; and further comprising the step of identifying an item leader for each item offered for sale.

40 47. (original) The method of claim 39, wherein a benefit is accorded each item leader.

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20 48. (original) The method of claims 19, wherein said minimum increment is fixed.

21 49. (original) The method of claims 19 wherein said minimum increment is an eighth function of an accumulation of values accorded to a bidder.

41 50. (previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein at least one of said first function and said second function is accumulated for all bids placed by each individual bidder up to a specific time.

42 51. (original) The method of claim 50, wherein said specific time is at the end of said first predetermined period of time.

43 52. (original) The method of claim 50, wherein said specific time is at the time of placing each bid.

44 45 53. (currently amended) A system for conducting an on-line auction, comprising:

means for offering at least one item for sale over a computer network, for a first predetermined period of time;

means or receiving a first bid for said item from a first bidder over said computer network;

means for according a first value to said first bidder as a first function of at least one of a timing of said first bid and a worth of said first bid;

means for receiving an at least one successive bid from at least one other bidder over said computer network;

means for according a second value to said at least one other bidder as a second function of at least one of a timing of said second bid and a worth of said at least one successive bid;

means for accumulating all values accorded said first bidder for each bid placed by said first bidder during said auction;

means for accumulating all values accorded each of said at least one other bidder for each bid placed by each said at least one other bidder during said auction;

means for comparing said accumulated values of said first bidder with said accumulated values of each said at least one other bidder;

means for identifying an auction leader based on a third function of said comparison of said accumulated values of said first bidder with said accumulated values of each of said at least one other bidder; whereby only said auction leader is permitted to make a ~~further~~ single final bid after said first predetermined period of time, thereby encouraging bidders to ~~bid~~ attempt to become the auction leader by bidding early and attempting to maintain the high bid throughout the auction.

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45   ~~54~~ (original) The system of claim ~~53~~, further comprising:

means for comparing said worth of said first bid and said worth of said at least one successive bid;

means for accumulating said value of said first bid when said worth of said first bid is higher than said worth of said at least one successive bid;

means for accumulating said value of said at least one successive bid when said worth of said at least one successive bid is higher than said worth of said first bid.

46   55. (original)   The system of claim 53, further comprising:

means for establishing a floor value of a bid on said item, and said according values to at least one of said first bid and said second bid depends upon the amount by which said at least one of said first bid and said at least one successive bid exceeds said floor value.

47   56. (original)   The system of claim 53, further comprising means for providing a discount to said auction leader; and

means for comparing the total of accumulated values accorded to said auction leader during said auction, to the total accumulated values accorded to said at least one successive bidder during said auction; and

wherein said amount of said discount is an eighth function of said comparison of said total of accumulated values accorded to said auction leader during said auction, to said total accumulated values of said at least one successive bidder during said auction.

57. (original)   The system of claim 53, further comprising:

48   means for continuing said auction after said first predetermined period of time for a second predetermined period of time; and

means for limiting participation in said auction during said second predetermined period of time to selected bidders based upon their total accumulated values for bids accorded during said first predetermined period of time.